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ABSTRACT

In 1988, the California legislature provided funding for development of two Middle College High School (MCHS) projects, one at Contra Costa College (CCC), and another one at Los Angeles Southwest College (LASC). The MCHS is a high school program on a college campus designed to meet the needs of high risk urban youth with college potential. Through visible peer models, small classes, and superior academic and support services, the MCHS's seek to reduce high school dropout rates, improve academic performance and self-esteem, and increase the likelihood of college attendance. The curriculum offered at both sites consists of basic courses for high school graduation in the college preparatory track, supplemented by college courses and high school electives. The role of MCHS teachers is that of teacher-counselor, in which the teacher and student-advises meet to discuss both school and personal problems. The project also has a career education and internship component, allowing students to relate their schooling to work opportunities. Despite budget problems, third-year enrollments increased by 45% at CCC, and by 21% at LASC, for a total of 139 and 242 students respectively, and student-to-teacher ratios were 28-to-1 at CCC, and 24-to-1 at LASC. Preliminary outcomes of the projects indicate that: (1) students' grades and attendance improved substantially beginning with their first year at MCHS; (2) most students' historical pattern of progressively poorer academic performance and increased absenteeism was stopped during the first year of MCHS; and (3) generally, performance declined for students returning for their second and third years, but these declines were less for the program's second returning class than for the first. (PAA)

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THE CALIFORNIA MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

7

A Report

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THE CALIFORNIA MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

7

A Report

Background

In 1971, Dr. Janet Lieberman (Special Assistant to the President for Educational Collaboratives at LaGuardia Community College in New York City) and a group of colleagues designed the Middle College High School (MCHS)—a collaborative high school program on a college campus designed to meet the needs of high risk urban youth with college potential—at LaGuardia Community College in New York City. The goals of the MCHS are to reduce high school dropout rates by improving students' academic performance, to improve students' self-concept and self-esteem, to improve the rate of students who enter college, and to enhance college and career options. To achieve these results, the MCHS provides visible peer models, small classes, and superior academic and support services. This model has proven successful at retaining at-risk students to graduation and sending them on to college. Because of the high rate of success, the Ford Foundation is providing funds to support its replication across the country.

Placing high school students on a college campus has shown that it exposes them to many opportunities not available in a traditional high school program. Thus, the MCHS model provides students with:

- Instructional programs with flexible pacing;
- Broad curriculum options;
- A career preparation emphasis with required internships;
- Increased personal attention through small classes and low student-to-staff ratios;
- The benefits of the maturing effects that a college environment provides;
- The opportunity to enroll in college courses after they meet eligibility requirements;

- The opportunity to attend joint programs;
- High school and/or college faculty team-taught courses;
- Peer counseling;
- Tutoring by college students; and
- Sharing of the college gymnasium, lounges, labs, library, and cafeterias.

In 1988, the California Legislature opted to provide funds for the planning and development of two MCHS projects in California, separate from the Ford Foundation effort. These projects were developed through the cooperative efforts of two California Community Colleges—Contra Costa College (northern California) and Los Angeles Southwest College (southern California)—and two local high school districts. The Chancellor's Office staff has overseen the implementation of the MCHS models at Contra Costa and LA Southwest since 1989. Since that time we have worked with the MCHS program staff to improve upon each of the previous year's successes and to strengthen the effectiveness of the MCHS components.

Analysis

This item is a discussion of the third report in a series of three external evaluation reports on California's two MCHS projects, which are in their fourth and final year of operation. The first report assessed the development of California MCHS projects from their early planning stages to the end of their first operational year in 1989-90. The second report assessed the development and outcomes of the MCHS to the end of their second year of operation in 1990-91. The third report describes and assesses their development and outcomes to the end of their third year of operation, 1991-92.

The MCHS project report is showing that the model reduces the high school dropout rate, improves the educational participation of currently underrepresented minority students, and increases high school graduation and college entrance rates.

Los Angeles Southwest MCHS is located in a predominantly low-income African-American neighborhood, while Contra Costa MCHS reflects a low-income, African-American and Latino population. Since project students' personal and educational problems are so closely related, and their lives so fragmented, MCHS redefined the role of a teacher as that of a teacher-counselor for a small number of students in a unit, called a "house," or "family." The "house/family" group allows:

- the teacher and the students/advisees to discuss school and personal problems, social issues, and community activities;
- closer student-teacher relationships; and

- higher levels of teacher responsibility for specific students' success.

A major project component is the career education and internship program, which is designed to give students an opportunity to succeed through work experience and to relate their schooling to work opportunities. Both MCHSs had an internship coordinator in place during the third year and students were placed in internships at each site. This component allows students to:

- rotate through a cycle of academic career education classes and unpaid internships;
- work in hospitals, schools, police stations, and social service agencies;
- earn high school credit for internships; and
- help earn enough academic credit for graduation.

Implementation of the Middle College High School Model

Progress towards implementation of the MCHS model and its components has been mixed. The implementation of the MCHS model was hindered at both sites—but especially at LA Southwest in the Los Angeles Unified School District—because of substantial budget problems. Despite budget problems:

- The third-year enrollments at Contra Costa MCHS increased 45 percent and LA Southwest increased 21 percent from year-end second-year enrollments.
- Communication and working relationships among the staff at Contra Costa remained very strong during the third year and are improving at LA Southwest with the arrival of a new college project director.
- Both sites have added new staff who have training in the MCHS mode; however, staff development activities continue to be limited at both sites.
- The staff at Contra Costa MCHS meets regularly—virtually daily—and effectively.
- The staff at LA Southwest meets weekly to discuss goals, and to plan program development and collaborative efforts; and, at the faculty level, the staff meets with LA Southwest College faculty monthly to plan and develop MCHS/college collaborations.

- ▶ The curriculum offered at both sites consists of the basic courses for high school graduation in a college preparatory track, supplemented by college courses and some high school electives.
- ▶ Contra Costa MCHS reports that their students are doing grade-level work; reports from LA Southwest MCHS are variable.
- ▶ Both MCHS programs are attempting innovative classroom and collaboration efforts to maintain the attention and attendance of their students.
- ▶ Counseling provided by full-time counselors continues to be strong at Contra Costa MCHS, where the dean and a counselor are available to 139 students.
- ▶ At LA Southwest MCHS, less than one full-time equivalent (FTE) counselor was available to 242 students—students who often require crisis intervention counseling.
- ▶ Labs for many classes have been scheduled to provide students with structured time to complete assignments and receive individual help from teachers, at both sites; however, a formal tutoring program is not established at either site.
- ▶ College support for MCHS continues to be strong at both sites.
- ▶ The recruitment and selection process at both sites once again improved over the previous year.
- ▶ Both MCHS programs have a favorable student-to-staff ratio, despite increasing enrollment this year.
- ▶ At Contra Costa, the student-to-staff ratio is approximately 15-to-1, while the student-to-teacher ratio is 28-to-1.
- ▶ At LA Southwest, where enrollment growth has leveled off, the student-to-staff ratio was reduced to less than 19-to-1 and the student-to-teacher ratio reduced to 24-to-1.

Student Outcomes

The student outcomes findings from both programs are not comprehensive at this stage. However, there are early indications that the MCHS at LA Southwest College and Contra Costa College have met with moderate success based on the results from the student outcome data. The analysis of early outcomes indicates that:

- students' grades and attendance improved substantially beginning with their first year at MCHS;
- after the MCHS intervention, most student's historical pattern of progressively poorer performance and increased absenteeism was stopped during the first year at MCHS;
- the performance of students returning for their second and third years at Contra Costa declined; and
- this decline occurred in their second year (from their first year), however, the decline for the second returning class was not as great as the first.

These outcomes are substantially positive in light of the characteristics of entering students. There is no clear explanation for the decline in the performance of returning students. It is expected that the effectiveness of the program will increase as the faculty and staff gain experience working with the model, the students, and with improvements in the selection of students appropriate for the MCHS experience.

It is important to note that the ultimate success of the MCHS project in California will not be known until after the first several classes have graduated. It is clear from the first three years of operation that a meritorious effort has gone into the development and implementation of the programs to assure their success. It is also important to note that these efforts have been implemented during one of the most difficult economic and social periods of California's history.

Implications

This report is provided as an information item only. There are direct implications on the local districts and colleges serving these two projects since this is the final year of funding for the two MCHS projects. If funding for these projects does not continue beyond the 1992-93 year, the consequences are that the projects will close and the students in these programs will either return to their regular high school program or drop out of high school altogether. In addition, there will be a reduction in FTES for the colleges that concurrently enroll MCHS students and loss of direct grant support for the colleges to run the programs.

Implications for the Chancellor's Office include loss of the oversight responsibilities of these projects, which would result in the termination of a four-year effort to monitor the successful transition of these projects to the host districts, if funding for these projects does not continue beyond 1992-93.

This project supports the following initiatives from *The Basic Agenda: Policy Directions and Priorities for the Nineties*.

- Intensify efforts to increase the number and success of underrepresented students in transfer programs.
- Improve the retention of underrepresented students through instruction and student services.

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THE CALIFORNIA MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

In 1971, Dr. Janet Lieberman (Special Assistant to the President for Educational Collaboratives at LaGuardia Community College in New York City) and a group of colleagues designed the Middle College High School (MCHS)—a collaborative high school program on a college campus designed to meet the needs of high risk urban youth with college potential—at LaGuardia Community College in New York City. The goals of the MCHS are to reduce high school dropout rates by improving students' academic performance, to improve students' self-concept and self-esteem, to improve the rate of students who enter college, and to enhance college and career options. To achieve these results, the MCHS provides visible peer models, small classes, and superior academic and support services. This model has proven successful at retaining at-risk students to graduation and sending them on to college. Because of the high rate of success, the Ford Foundation is providing funds to support its replication across the country.

This item is a summary of the third report in a series of three external evaluation reports on California's two MCHS projects. The third-year report describes and assesses their development and outcomes to the end of the third year of operation, 1991-92. It is divided into six sections, each of which describes elements critical to the implementation of the MCHS model. The six sections describe (1) the relationships between school districts; (2) staffing, staff relationships, and professional development; (3) student selection and behavior; (4) curriculum, "house/family," and tutoring; (5) the internship program; and (6) student outcomes. A seventh section is included that presents future directions regarding the MCHS projects.

Relationship Between School Districts

In 1988, the California Legislature opted to provide funds for the planning and development of two MCHS projects in California, separate from the Ford Foundation effort. These projects were developed through the cooperative efforts of two California Community Colleges—Contra Costa College (northern California) and Los Angeles Southwest College (southern California)—and two local high schools districts. The Chancellor's Office staff has overseen the implementation of the MCHS model at Contra Costa and LA Southwest since 1989. Since that time we have worked with the MCHS program staff to improve upon each of the previous year's successes and to strengthen the effectiveness of the MCHS components.

The relationship between Contra Costa College and the Richmond Unified School District (RUSD) remains very supportive of the MCHS program. RUSD's commitment to the MCHS project is from the top to the bottom, i.e., from the board and

central district administration to the teaching faculty. Given the fiscal constraints faced by the district, the morale has continued to be high throughout the year. In fact, the MCHS has weathered the district's budget woes better than most of the other schools in the district. The sense is that MCHS staff and student morale is substantially more positive and is one of opportunity and achievement.

At Contra Costa MCHS this year, the joint MCHS/College Faculty Operations Committee, with the support of the faculty senate president, have been working on a more effective integration of MCHS students into college classes. The college and the MCHS have agreed that the MCHS will focus its curriculum and resources on ninth and tenth grade students and on a core of courses for eleventh and twelfth graders. MCHS students are taking eighty three college classes, primarily in math and science. There are generally two or three MCHS students enrolled in most college classes they take, and they are not a behavior problem.

The LA Southwest College faculty has involved itself more with the MCHS this past year. The college supports the MCHS by enabling high school students to take college classes; it has also provided three classes taught exclusively for MCHS students. Several courses have been designed especially for MCHS students, including anthropology, theater, and art. According to Natalee Battersbee, principal at LA Southwest MCHS, about 70 percent of twelfth graders, 60 percent of eleventh graders, and 15 percent of tenth graders take at least one class from LA Southwest College. This is a collaborative effort that benefits both the college and the MCHS: the college receives FTES funds for these courses while the classroom size for the MCHS, which currently is well above the 12-to-1 MCHS model ratio, is reduced.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) representatives report this year that the district board continues to be very supportive of the Options Program, of which MCHS is a part. However, of major concern this year—brought about by the district's financial condition—is the district's requirement that MCHS meet certain "norms" in order to retain its funding. These norms essentially require that MCHS must maintain a 35-to-1 student-to-staff ratio. This is the same norm that applies to the regular high schools, although other LAUSD options alternative schools are only required to maintain a 20-to-1, and in some cases a 15-to-1, ratio.

Maintaining a 35-to-1 ratio is a great constraint on implementing the MCHS design. The LAUSD "norming" requirement puts a great deal of pressure on the MCHS to enroll its students in college classes as its chief, if not only, means to reduce its own class size. In addition, this year the MCHS suffered from a lack of, or late arrival of, textbooks. This was reported to be part of the LAUSD's ongoing inability to supply the MCHS with appropriate office and classroom equipment and supplies.

Staffing, Relationships, and Professional Development

Contra Costa MCHS started the 1991-92 school year with nine staff members, adding a new teaching position to the four it had the prior year. The number of students increased 45 percent from the 1990-91 year-end—from 96 students to 139 at the end of 1991-92. However, with the 45 percent increase in student enrollments, class sizes also increased. The student-to-staff ratio was still only about 16-to-1, and the MCHS class sizes, at an average of 20-to-1, were still substantially smaller than corresponding regular high school classes. Because of appropriate planning, teachers expressed the view that the increase in class size did not significantly impact classroom activities or learning.

The Los Angeles Southwest MCHS opened its 1991-92 academic year with 242 students and thirteen staff. LA Southwest MCHS has, for the first time, a complete complement of three classes of students. Class size decreased somewhat from the prior year when the student-to-teacher ratio decreased from 29-to-1 to approximately 24-to-1; however, it is still significantly more than the 17-to-1 ratio from the first year. In 1991-92, class sizes ranged from 20 to 35 students. The teachers expressed concern that the increase in class size has made it very difficult to be effective. This is especially the case when classes exceed twenty-five students, given the special needs and characteristics of MCHS students. The LAUSD budget problems and salary cuts have led to a certain amount of tension among teachers over philosophical differences on how to deal with students. However, the principal continues to provide strong and dynamic leadership and the staff is committed to the MCHS concept and to the school.

Student Selection and Behavior

Teachers reported this year that the quality and appropriateness of new student work had improved over the previous year. The original class of ninth graders are now in the eleventh grade, and, attrition notwithstanding, are still seen as the weakest of the current three classes. The improvement in students' work is attributed to better recruiting, which has succeeded in communicating to school counselors and potential students what the MCHS is about and what students could expect from it.

The LA Southwest MCHS is located in an area of Los Angeles where violent crime is among the highest in the United States. Given the odds of survival among the youth in this Los Angeles neighborhood, there is a sense (among the teachers) that the new students have a better demeanor than the returning students.

Among the new class are some students with strong academic potential. The MCHS students have a great deal of trouble maintaining their attention when conventional methods of instruction, such as lecture, are used. Consequently, the teachers have been working hard to develop curriculum content and use methods that actively involve each student and that maintains their interest during a class. Besides the shift in pedagogy, the school has tried other things, such as detention for absences and

tardiness. They found that negative consequences did not work well and have shifted to an incentive program where good behavior and attendance are rewarded with points that add up to earn awards, such as a Walkman radio or a harbor cruise.

The MCHS staff are working to identify additional college faculty that will devote classroom and non-classroom time to get to know the students personally. The staff speaks of MCHS as a safe harbor for students, noting that some students do not even have a home they can return to after school. Many parents have reported to teachers that their child is attending school far more often and achieving much more than he or she has in the previous years. In many cases, students see MCHS teachers as the only stabilizing figure in their lives.

Curriculum, "House/Family," and Tutoring

The teachers at Contra Costa MCHS report that a college preparatory curriculum is being taught at MCHS. The returning English teacher reports that the students in her English classes are very bright and are capable of high level—even college level—work. Again this year, the Natural Science 10 class is being co-taught by a MCHS teacher and seven Contra Costa faculty. This college class has twenty-eight college students and twelve MCHS students.

Teachers report an unusual cohesiveness among the students at MCHS. Students say the school is not cliquish. New students find, for example, that rather than being outcast, they are welcomed. The school atmosphere is personal and friendly.

The LA Southwest MCHS offers the standard array of college preparatory classes. This third year, a trigonometry class was arranged for MCHS students since the MCHS math teacher already had a full load. More than 25 percent of the students are taking one or more college classes, including anthropology, theater, art, English, math, and computer science courses. The MCHS teachers are attempting many collaborative arrangements among themselves and with college faculty to improve teaching methods and to increase student interest in the courses. However, teachers have noted that collaborative efforts take a significant amount of time to plan and implement. One barrier to developing collaborative arrangements with the college faculty arises from the small number of full-time instructors in many of its departments. LA Southwest College has a significant number of part-time faculty on its payroll.

A sports program is functioning and continues to develop. Baseball, basketball, swimming, and marathon teams have been formed. Students have physical education classes and take other physical education classes, such as weight training and aerobics, from the college.

Internship Program

In consultation with Janet Lieberman, the creator of the MCHS model and consultant for the Ford Foundation's MCHS project, the Contra Costa MCHS decided that there had not been enough systematic preparation of MCHS students for internships. The emphasis has been shifted to developing a course on career preparation. Ultimately, the goal is to provide students with internships that make a real contribution to their career development and provide an entree to a career.

For 1991-92, tenth graders completed a personal and career development class. Internships are scheduled for eleventh graders during either the first or the second semester. Students spend half a day at school and half a day at their internships, Monday through Friday. The MCHS has found that internships developed for each student's specific interests work better than standing internships from which students can choose.

Student Outcomes

The student outcomes findings from both programs are not comprehensive at this stage. The analysis of early outcomes indicates that students' grades and attendance improved substantially beginning with their first year at MCHS. Before the MCHS intervention, absences from school were increasing to the point where students were missing their basic subjects virtually every other day in the last semester before enrolling in MCHS. The findings indicate that this pattern of progressively poorer performance and increased absenteeism was stopped during the student's first year at MCHS. However, the findings regarding the performance of students returning for their second and third year are disappointing in some respects. At Contra Costa, the grades of two classes of returning students declined from their first year to their second year, although the decline for the second returning class was not as great as the first.

These outcomes are substantially positive in light of the characteristics of entering students and the still-developing implementation of the MCHS model. The decline in the performance of returning students is, however, disappointing. There is no clear explanation for it. It is expected that the effectiveness of the program will increase as the faculty and staff gain experience working with the model, the students, and with improvements in the selection of students appropriate for the MCHS experience.

There are early indications that the MCHSs at LA Southwest College and Contra Costa College have met with moderate success based on the results from the student outcome data. However, it is important to note that the ultimate success of the MCHS in California will not be known until after the first several classes have graduated. It is clear from the first three years of operation that a meritorious effort has gone into the development and implementation of the programs to assure their

success. And it is important to note that these efforts have been implemented during one of the most difficult economic and social periods of California's history.

Future Directions

An area of future involvement for the Chancellor's Office will be to work with the Statewide Academic Senate and the local academic senates to improve community college faculty involvement in these projects.

Finally, a concrete effort will be undertaken to improve the cooperation between the Los Angeles Unified School District and Los Angeles Community College District. Although we have reported an improvement in the cooperation between the MCHS, the host colleges, and the central district administrations—as in the case of Richmond Unified School District—in our assessment, this has not been the case between Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles Community College District.

This was a critical year for the MCHS programs. This final year, 1992-93, is the year the MCHSs show that they work and are worthy of continued funding from the state. The proposed 1993-94 Governor's Budget currently does not provide for any additional appropriations for the MCHSs. Although the MCHS programs survived during the worst fiscal crisis ever for the Richmond and Los Angeles Unified school districts, the fiscal condition of the districts will have a long-term impact on the overall success of the two projects.